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ABSTRACT

In the Mesa, Arizona, public schools, 4-year-old children with birthdays during the period from September to December were allowed to enter kindergarten if they passed the district screening test. Kindergarten teachers disagreed with this policy and recommended that, with no exceptions, the district no longer enroll 4-year-old children. Subsequently, a survey was sent to all kindergarten teachers in the district in order to solicit their opinions regarding kindergarten entrance requirements. It was found that 90 percent of the teachers believed that children should be allowed to enter kindergarten only if they were 5 years of age by September 1. In addition, a large percentage of the teachers believed that chronological age was the best criterion for determining a child's readiness. Over 40 percent of the teachers indicated they would support entrance of a 4-year-old child if that child passed a developmental readiness test. Since teachers recommended fewer 4.5-year-olds than 5- to 5.5-year-olds be retained in kindergarten, the survey data did suggest that age should not be the sole criterion for kindergarten entrance. Data further suggest that the social and emotional maturity of the youngest children are relevant admission criteria. Findings indicate that in all three age groups more boys than girls were recommended for kindergarten retention; these sex differences reached statistical significance in the 5- to 5.5-year-old age group only. (RH)

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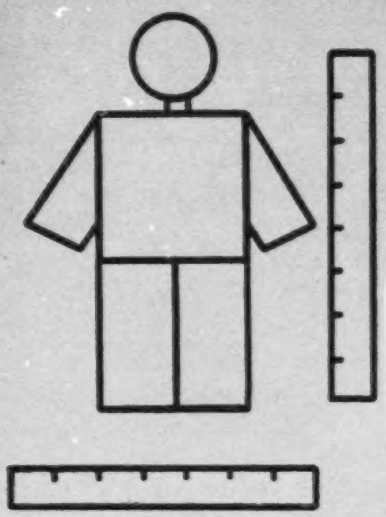

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research and evaluation

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TECH MEMO

to: DOUG VANCE

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through: JIM DEGRACIE

subject: KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE AGE REQUIREMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This study concerns the district policy on kindergarten entrance age requirements. Presently, four-year-old children with September, October, November, or December birthdays are allowed into kindergarten if they pass the district screening test. On January 14, 1982, kindergarten teachers met and recommended that the district no longer accept children whose fifth birthdays fall between September 1 and January 1, with no exceptions. The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) To determine teachers' opinions regarding the current policy and the recommendation to change it; and (2) To collect current age and readiness data in order to make decisions which are in the best interests of the children.

RESULTS

A survey was sent to all kindergarten teachers in the district in order to solicit their opinions regarding requirements for kindergarten entrance age. Table 1 presents the results of this survey. As can be seen, 90% of the teachers believe that children should only be allowed to enter kindergarten if they are five years old by September 1. In addition, a high percentage of the teachers believe that chronological age is the best criterion for determining a child's readiness and that children who are not

five years old by September 1 are socially, academically, and/or physically immature, and unable to experience success in school. However, it should also be noted that over 40% of the teachers would support entrance of a 4-year-old child if that child passed a developmental readiness test.

In order to collect age and readiness data on children who are currently in kindergarten, teachers were asked to indicate, for each child in their class, whether or not they think the child should be retained in kindergarten in the upcoming school year. In each case where retention was recommended, they were asked to indicate one or more of the following reasons for the recommendation: Socially Immature, Academically Unsuccessful, Physically Unsuccessful, and Emotionally Immature.

Students were organized into three age groups: those who were 4 1/2 to 5 years old (born 9/2/76 - 12/31/76) when they entered kindergarten, those who were 5 to 5 1/2 years old (born 1/1/76 - 9/1/76) when they entered kindergarten, and those who were 5 1/2 to 6 years old (born 9/1/75 - 12/31/75) when they entered kindergarten. Frequency counts were then made of the number of students in each age group that were recommended for retention, and if so, the reasons for the recommendation. Table 2 gives the number and percent of students in each age group that were or were not recommended for retention. The highest percentage of recommended retentions occurred among the 5 to 5 1/2-year-old group, and the next highest occurred among the 4 1/2 to 5-year-olds. A chi-square analysis revealed that the groups differed significantly ($p<.05$) in the proportion of

students that were recommended for retention.

Table 3 provides results of frequency counts by age group of the reasons that were given for the recommendation. These reflect duplicated counts since teachers could indicate more than one reason for retention for each student. The reason cited most frequently for the older two groups was Academically Unsuccessful (98% and 90%), while the most common reason for the youngest group was Socially Immature (87%).

It was believed that sex of the students might influence their readiness for kindergarten since girls mature earlier than do boys. Therefore, the data were also tallied in terms of sex, and the results are shown in Table 4. As can be seen, nearly 2/3 of the 4 1/2 to 5-year-olds who entered kindergarten were girls, while a greater majority of those who were 5 1/2 to 6 years old were boys. Chi-square analyses revealed that the only age group in which boys and girls differed significantly with respect to retention was the 5 to 5 1/2-years-olds. At this age level, teachers recommended that a significantly greater number of boys than girls be retained. The data for the other age groups are biased, however, since more 4 1/2 to 5-year-old boys than girls are being kept from entering school for one year. Either parents are voluntarily keeping their boys out of school or the developmental readiness test is screening out more boys than girls.

SUMMARY

The current data on kindergarten students lead to several conclusions. First, even though a majority of teachers are against allowing 4 1/2-year-olds to enter kindergarten, they recommended that a smaller percentage of 4 1/2-year-olds be retained than the 5 to 5 1/2-year-olds. Apparently, 4 1/2-year-olds who pass the developmental readiness test can be as successful in kindergarten as older students. When they are not successful, it tends to be due to social and emotional immaturity more than academic or physical problems. These factors are important considerations for policy decisions concerning kindergarten entrance requirements.

Another potentially important factor to consider is sex of the child. A greater percentage of boys than girls in each age group were recommended for retention; the only significant difference, however, occurred between 5 to 5 1/2-year-old boys and girls. It should be kept in mind that the data are biased by the fact that more 4 1/2 to 5-year-old boys are being kept out of school for one year. This data does not indicate that boys should be kept out of school if not 5 years old by September 1st. Further research would be needed to determine if a disproportionate number of boys fail the readiness test. Boys who pass the test can succeed in school.

Overall, the data suggest that age should not be the sole criterion for kindergarten entrance requirements, since

4 1/2-year-olds can be successful in school. Individual factors such as social and emotional maturity should be taken into consideration in addition to academic criteria. Those children who pass the readiness test can succeed. These conclusions are based on limited data; therefore, a plan needs to be implemented for tracking these students by age groups in order to collect longitudinal data. Possible variables to look at include: whether or not students were actually retained, achievement test scores, and teacher evaluations of students' maturity.

TABLE 1
RESULTS OF KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE AGE SURVEY
KINDERGARTEN TEACHER RESPONSES

STATEMENT		Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
1. I would support a recommendation the district accept children into kindergarten ONLY if they are five years of age by September 1st of the year they enter school.	N	56	19	2	6	1	84
	%	67	23	2	7	1	100
2. Generally speaking, it is my belief children whose birthdays fall after September 1st are unable to experience success in school.	N	16	43	8	15	1	83
	%	19	52	10	18	1	100
3. I would support entry of a child in kindergarten whose birthday falls after September 1st if a developmental readiness test indicated readiness for school learning activities.	N	11	25	3	30	13	82
	%	13	30	4	37	16	100
4. Generally, I believe children whose birthdays fall after September 1st, are either socially, academically and/or physically immature.	N	29	42	2	6	3	82
	%	36	51	2	7	4	100
5. Chronological age is the best of available criteria for determining a child's readiness for learning in school.	N	14	35	9	15	6	79
	%	18	44	11	19	8	100

TABLE 2
Number and Percent of Students in Each
Age Group that were Recommended for Retention

		Recommended for Retention		
Birth Date*		Yes	No	Total
9/1/75 - 12/31/75 (5 1/2 - 6 year olds)	N	46	838	884
	%	5.2	94.8	100
1/1/76 - 9/1/76 (5 - 5 1/2 year olds)	N	229	1813	2042
	%	11.2	88.8	100
9/2/76 - 12/31/76 (4 1/2 - 5 year olds)	N	15	167	182
	%	8.2	91.8	100
Total	N	290	2818	3108
	%	9.3	90.7	100

*Significant differences at $p<.05$

TABLE 3
Percentage of Students Recommended for
Retention Classified by Problem Areas

	Reason for Retention			
Birth Rate	Socially Immature	Academically Unsuccessful	Physically Unsuccessful	Emotionally Immature
9/1/75 - 12/31/75 (5 1/2 - 6 year olds)	60.9	97.9	24.0	50.0
1/1/76 - 9/1/76 (5 - 5 1/2 year olds)	65.2	90.1	30.0	59.1
9/2/76 - 12/31/76 (4 1/2 - 5 year olds)	86.6	53.4	33.4	60.0

TABLE 4
Percentages of Students Classified by Age,
Sex, and Recommended Retention

Birth Date	Sex	% of Age Group	% Recommended for Retention		
			Yes	No	Total
9/1/75 - 12/31/75 (5 1/2 - 6 year olds)	Male	60.5	5.4	94.6	100
	Female	39.5	4.9	95.1	100
1/1/76 - 9/1/76* (5 - 5 1/2 year olds)	Male	52.2	14.6	85.4	100
	Female	47.8	7.5	92.5	100
9/2/76 - 12/31/76 (4 1/2 - 5 year olds)	Male	34.6	11.1	88.9	100
	Female	65.4	6.7	92.3	100

*Significant difference ($p<.05$) between males and females